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"Women Should be Forced Into Treatment to Stop Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Says UD Law Professor" (1991). *News Releases*. 7151.
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The University of Dayton

News Release

May 23, 1991
Contact: Jim Feuer

WOMEN SHOULD BE FORCED INTO TREATMENT TO STOP FETAL ALCOHOL SYNDROME, SAYS UD LAW PROFESSOR

DAYTON, Ohio -- Every year, thousands of babies are born with fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS)--a disease characterized by physical and mental abnormalities. Some communities, such as Native American, are affected more than others.

Because people with FAS tend to become alcohol abusers themselves--perpetuating the problem among their children--community good must take precedent over individual rights, and pregnant women who abuse alcohol should be forced into treatment programs, according to a University of Dayton law professor.

"Women have legitimate concerns about using the law to make them inferior again or in ways men don't have to go through, but what it does in the area of FAS is set up a system whereby we create a biological underclass," says Vernellia Randall, an expert in health care law.

Randall will be on a panel discussing FAS on Thursday, May 30, at a meeting of the American Society of Law and Medicine's health law teachers section at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque.

Randall, a public health nurse for 15 years, is also writing a paper on FAS titled "Slaves, Women and Fetuses: A Commonality."

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Randall titled her paper as she did because "oppression in this country historically has been based on one group carving out a legal niche that makes its status superior in all circumstances and then maintaining that superiority by pointing to the law as justification for overriding everyone else's interests.

"Blacks were made slaves so that the status of white men and women would always be superior. Women were denied voting rights and property rights for similar reasons. And those who argue that individual rights are always superior are making the same sort of analysis historically done to women and minorities. They are willing to work on the problem of FAS but only to the extent it does not interfere with the individual rights of a woman."

As a public health issue, the focus is not the individual or the fetus but the community good--its health and needs, says Randall.

"Certainly, preventing FAS requires education, counseling and federal funding to reduce poverty, but when all is said and done, the question remains, 'What will motivate the woman to stop abusing alcohol?'

"For the woman who is a light to moderate user, it could be her pregnancy. However, pregnancy is not likely to be a motivator for the addicted person. For those individuals, I think we should commit them--not to prisons or mental hospitals but to drug treatment programs specifically tailored to address the needs of the pregnant woman."

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To schedule media interviews, contact **Jim Feuer**, director of media relations, at (513) 229-3241.

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Personal letters were sent to these places May 23 on the Vernellia Randall story concerning fetal alcohol syndrome:

Working Woman: Judy Faust
Ms.: Barbara Findlen
The New York Times: David Margolick
The Wall Street Journal: Stephen J. Adler
Business Week: Michelle Galen
American Health: Judith Groch
Elle: Judy Kuker
Glamour: Stephanie Young
Essence: Linda Villarosa
Family Circle: Nancy Josephson
Health: Catherine Winters
Journal: Margery D. Rosen
Insight: Monica Powell
Legal Times: Ann Pelham
Mademoiselle: Katherine Ames Brown
McCall's: Leslie Smith
National Journal: W. John Moore
National Law Journal: Ken Myers
New Woman: Kathy L. Green
Newsweek: Dominique Browning
Parade: Larry Smith
Parent's: Cynthia Carney
People: Nancy Pierce Williamson
Redbook: Julia Martin
Time: John F. Stacks
U.S. News: David Whitman
Woman's Day: Sally Koslow
Working Mother: Linda Hamilton Clinton
USA Today: Kitty Yancey